



**SIRIUS Danish Team Final Dissemination Event, 5-6 October 2020,  
Roskilde University:**

**“Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Danish Labour Market:  
Challenges and Opportunities”**

A summary report prepared by Katrine Sofie Bruun and Michelle Pace

The EU-funded SIRIUS Horizon 2020 research project explores skills and integration of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in European Labour Markets. Project partners comprise Glasgow Caledonian University (UK), Université de Genève (Switzerland), European University Institute (Italy), University of Florence (Italy), Charles University (The Czech Republic), Roskilde University (Denmark), Solidar (Belgium), Solidarity Now (Greece), University of Jyväskylä (Finland), University of Parma (Italy), National Technical University Athens (Greece) and Multikulturní Centrum Praha (The Czech Republic).

The key findings of the SIRIUS Danish research team were presented at a final dissemination event organized at Roskilde University on 5-6 October 2020 at which participants, stakeholders and guest speakers were invited to share their perspectives and contribute to a further discussion.

From 1 January 2018 to this date, the SIRIUS Danish team of researchers investigated the legal, social, economic and political barriers and enablers associated with integration of refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers into the Danish labour market.

The project identifies labour market integration as a crucial aspect of indicators of general integration and of the sense of leading a meaningful existence - that is, socially, legally and financially. As such, labour market integration often proves the shortest route for migrants to learn the host language, improve their mental health, secure their legal status as well as a way of earning the trust and respect of so-called ethnic Danes. As such, identifying barriers to labour market integration of migrants, and improving their access to qualified work, will benefit individuals and societies alike.

Professor Michelle Pace (MP), SIRIUS Danish lead partner, opened the event by welcoming all guest speakers and participants (those who were physically present as well as those who were online, due to COVID-19 restrictions) and by thanking the Danish team of researchers, as well as all interviewees who have shown a dedicated engagement to the project and the crucial debate on integration of third-country nationals into the Danish labour market. She then invited Peter Kragelund, Dean of Social Sciences and head of the Department of Social Sciences and Business at Roskilde University to take the floor.

Peter also welcomed everyone on behalf of Roskilde University and explained how the date of 5-6<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 marked just about 5 years since then Prime Minister of Denmark, Lars Løkke Rasmussen's (Opening Address/inaugural speech to the *Folketing*/Parliament) announced a new integration policy-approach wherein the focus would be on ensuring that refugees found employment immediately after being granted asylum in Denmark. Characterizing the high levels of unemployment among migrants with a "non-Western ethnic background" as indicative of the failure of existing integration policies, Rasmussen had declared this new policy focus to be aimed at refugees arriving in Denmark in the wake of the European "refugee crisis". The underlying assumption was that it was through employment that refugees would be socially, culturally and economically integrated into Danish society. Peter emphasized that in spite of the polarization created in public and policy debates - generated by such political narratives in the context of the post-2014 influx of refugees, asylum applicants and migrants - European countries need to work out an evidence-based way to deal with migration and asylum rather than a prejudice-based one. It is here, he emphasized, that the SIRIUS project fills a very important gap. He continued by saying that the Danish team and their local stakeholders will – during the course of these two days - present a comprehensive analysis of barriers and enablers in the labour market integration of third-country nationals (TCNs) including migrants, refugees and asylum applicants (MRAs) in Denmark. He wrapped

up his presentation by referring to the stories of humans that participants will be privy to during this important event and that carry out the important work of transforming places and making them habitable. Some of these narratives, he argued, may refer to a lack of presence, of fragmentation, but many are stories of hope, resilience and perseverance. He said that at RUC we consider this to be an immense privilege and he concluded by wishing everyone two very productive days of engagement and thorough reflections on what is a key issue of our times.

Following Peter Kragelund's welcoming speech, Day One of this event proceeded with a presentation by the SIRIUS project Danish lead partner MP who focused on the key findings of the work of the Danish team. She started by presenting the SIRIUS integration model consisting of macro (legal, policy, economic and social features), meso (societal actors/social partners) and micro (personal characteristics) levels that enhance or act as constraining factors for labour migrant integration of MRAs. Amongst integration barriers she highlighted the availability and quality of Danish language courses and whether these courses are free or paying courses. Further barriers include the legal status of MRAs meaning that the right to work is contingent on status in Denmark: Sometimes this status is 'intentionally' made difficult for migrants, thus creating a 'hostile environment'. Michelle continued by arguing that one of the major and further barriers to labour market integration of MRAs in a Danish context is the lack of recognition of skills, experience and previous qualifications that MRAs bring with them upon arrival in Denmark. Adding to this the Danish team found that in Denmark there is a general climate of xenophobia that puts emphasis on the need for security of the Danish nation whilst sidelining refugees' need for protection. From the point of view of MRAs further barriers to their integration into the Danish labour market include lack of information about integration services, employment and education opportunities and workplace norms coupled with a lack of networks as well as cultural aspects/perceptions about gender roles. On a positive note, MP said that a number of enabling factors have also emerged from the Danish team's research: It is in fact possible for the Danish system to build on the skills and competences recognition profile tool for third-country nationals provided by the [EU](#). This would ensure that there is an early recognition of the heterogeneity of migrants with different skills levels, learning capacities and language training needs. Legally and administratively, the Danish system would benefit from a process that is responsive at a faster pace and that makes the regulatory-admin procedure intelligible and transparent. Furthermore, tools for sharing information about where to get papers/admin procedures done, but also about the labour market (jobs available) can be improved. There are already many NGOs across Denmark, but particularly in Copenhagen,

which facilitate network development outside ‘ethnic groups’, promote opportunities which increase mutual understanding and encourage an on-going social dialogue that actively discusses and discourages xenophobic attitudes and behaviors (especially in political/public discourse). MP concluded her presentation by sharing with participants the SIRIUS Workeen app for Android mobile phones. This is a serious game application, created by a team of political scientists, sociologists, economists and software engineers based in the SIRIUS seven European countries and in Canada, to provide practical guidance and hands-on soft-skills training for anyone entering the labour market for the first time. She also briefly mentioned the SIRIUS WORKERS documentary which participants will be able to watch and discuss during Day Two of this event. She thanked everyone for their attention and said that she looked forward to the ongoing discussions, questions and comments over the course of the two days.

After an engaging discussion about the issues that MP had raised and thereafter a short break, the event continued with a panel discussion on Labour Market Integration: Why does it matter? moderated by MP. Panelists included: Liv Bjerre (LB), Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University and SIRIUS Research Associate who focused her presentation on categories of migrants and the impact on women; Rasmus Fink (RF), Case Handler at the Danish Business Authority who presented the Danish integrative vocational training program (that is, the IGU program) and refugee integration; Jan Hendeliowitz (JH), Labour Economist (M.Sc.) and former Employment Director, Ministry of Employment, as well as Member of the Regional Council, Zealand and Chair of the Social Democratic Group who discussed labour market integration in the context of the Danish policy approach, as well as Karen Nielsen Bredahl (KNB), Associate Professor, Department of Politics and Society at Aalborg University who talked about the importance of labour market integration, in a Danish context, for immigrants themselves and for the broader society.

Liv elaborated on the status of foreigners as key to the opportunities and challenges that they face as well as on their priorities and background. Here, she argued, third-country nationals have varying rights to entry, residence as well as economic and social entitlements. Ostentatiously, foreigners can largely be divided into asylum applicants, refugees, those under subsidiary protection, those under temporary protection, undocumented migrants and economic migrants, where many do not have the right to work within the formal employment market: Although, she acknowledged, the legal status of individuals can change over time and across space. Liv then presented two political discourses posing a clear distinction between

‘The Burdensome Refugees’ and ‘The Highly Skilled Western Migrants’. While non-Western migrants are framed as a burden to the Danish welfare state, highly skilled (Western) migrants (and their families) are framed as beneficial to the Danish state, she noted. Thus, she continued, established political narratives generally assume a correlation between being Western and being skilled, while being non-Western often signifies being unskilled and thus perceived as a burden to society. Accordingly, the integration strategy in relation to ‘The Burdensome Refugees’ then becomes one of minimizing expenses, providing little to no assistance and aiming to get refugees to work as quickly as possible regardless of the type of employment and their individual qualifications and capacities. She added that the main implications of such a policy stance are reportedly stress, anxiety, feelings of devaluation and de-motivation on the part of refugees. There are also numerous societal implications as a result of such a policy position, she emphasized, as it ultimately leads to an increased dependency on the welfare state, as well as to an unrealized potential with regards to utilizing the skills of third-country nationals in the Danish employment market. She further highlighted how the gender aspect is crucial in this regard. Elaborately, women commonly arrive in Denmark based on spousal visas or through gaining ‘consequence statuses’, while their asylum applications are being processed. As such, women are often legally dependent upon their spouses. Additionally, women report a lack of social support from their spouses, facing societal prejudice, navigating the rules and criteria pertaining to their legal statuses as main barriers to labour market integration. Generally, Liv added, there is a gendered differentiation with regard to the legal, financial and social obstacles as well as language barriers with regard to women’s general integration and labour market integration specifically. Finally, LB concluded that enabling factors could potentially be offering an equal status to all migrants regardless of gender, shifting the focus to resources that all migrants bring and ensuring involvement and assistance rather than control in the established institutional approach to migrants and refugees.

Rasmus (RF) thereafter took the floor and presented the key parameters of the IGU program. He explained how he had researched this program for his Masters thesis at Roskilde University during 2019/early 2020. The IGU entered into force on July 1, 2016 as a new and more efficient job training program (*Integrationsgrunduddannelse* in Danish) by which new arrivals are gradually - over the course of two years - brought into regular employment. The integrative training program is part of the Danish tripartite agreement, which the social partners: the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA), concluded with the Danish government. It is assumed that at the initial stage refugees may not

possess the skills required to qualify for a job on regular Danish wage levels and working conditions. This program thus includes a so-called apprentice pay and is designed as a model through which work is combined with intensive training. Thus the IGU program, he explained, allows refugees to enter the labour market through traineeships at Danish companies. It also offers refugees the possibility to upgrade their vocational and language skills. In many ways, it is a program that seeks to direct refugees away from dependence on welfare benefits and into active employment. It is framed as a way in which refugees can provide for themselves and their families. From the beneficiaries of the IGU program that RF had interviewed it transpires that they found the program to be a meaningful activity and helped them to improve their mental health. The feeling shared among beneficiaries has been that the IGU helped them move from being passive receivers of Danish welfare to being contributors to the Danish society. They also felt that they had gained respect from native Danes while on the program. RF also highlighted the work of NGOs like Trampoline House in Copenhagen which focus on refugees who fall out of schemes like IGU. However he criticized the underlying assumption behind the IGU model that a beneficiary who follows the program and training scheme will automatically see that everything else falls in place after this experience. It is here that RF insisted that one needs to question the type and kind, as well as quality, of employment that beneficiaries experience under this scheme. A basic wage education under the IGU model mainly consists of unskilled labour and therefore jobs are on offer in unskilled sectors. Also from his interviews with beneficiaries he concluded that interaction with ethnic Danes shows that this very much depends on which job one lands with. Opportunities to practice Danish for refugees are limited because they make few Danish friends and when they return home from their traineeship they often speak their mother tongue. It therefore follows from his research that many young refugees in particular arrive in Denmark with half completed degrees but quite an extensive job experience but end up in unskilled jobs. They therefore focus on the IGU opportunity as a way of getting some income to send remittances to their extended families in their original home country. What they need most of all is an assurance that they can build on their previous experiences and a future in Denmark. It is for these reasons that RF concluded by suggesting more coordination between policy makers and civil society organisations in Denmark when it comes specifically to labour market integration of MRAs.

Jan (JH) presented a historical overview of how, during the early 1990s, Denmark had been left with less skilled migrants from Bosnia due to a lack of a concrete skills profiling system for new arrivals. He went on to explain how the Social Democrats in Denmark had the same

approach for native Danes as well as immigrants; primarily a work first stance. He made the point that it is important to accumulate knowledge of the status of the labour market in the regions of Denmark where MRAs are located. He continued to explain how civil servants (employed in contexts where jobs are needed by MRAs) require training to understand the family situation of MRAs, how to acknowledge the experiences and skills they bring with them to Denmark, and how to fit their profiles with job sectors where these skills and experiences can best be put to use for society as a whole. He argued that the employment rates of MRAs in a Danish context are actually quite good and reflect the high employment rates that are found also in neighbouring Sweden and Norway. It is however a fact that there are large differences of employment within non-Western groups. For example, it is the Kurdish community in Denmark that shows a high rate of employment, while the percentage for Somalis is low. He also referred to a [study](#) which showed that in 2018, about 44% of Somalis in Denmark lived in a parallel society (often referred to as “ghettos” in Denmark). He indicated that employment rates among men and women who arrived in Denmark as refugees during the 2015 so-called “refugee crisis” showed that ([Here](#)) roughly 20% of women and 56% of men are in [employment](#). What we observe, JH commented, is that the second generation of migrants often does much better in the Danish labour market. From a policy perspective it is frequently the case that migrants have to fill in the vacant jobs available in particular sectors. Ideally, these should match the qualifications that migrants bring with them of course. He concluded by reminding participants that we have also experienced a change in Danish public opinion where the perception is that Denmark needs qualified foreigners.

The final panelist to take the floor was Karen (KNB). Her presentation revolved around the question of why labour market integration in Denmark matters for immigrants themselves and for society as a whole. Karen first presented employment frequency statistics from 2019, conducted by ‘Danmarks Statistik’ (Danish Statistics), displaying how ethnic Danes between the ages of 16-64 have had a higher employment rate than immigrants for the entirety of the period from 1988-2018. In addition, this data highlights how there is a further differentiation between ‘Western immigrants’ and ‘non-Western immigrants’, where the employment rate of ‘non-Western’ immigrants has been significantly lower than that of ‘Western’ immigrants throughout the same period. However, although there continues to be a significant gap between these groups with regard to their employment rate, the gap has nonetheless decreased markedly during the period from 2008-2018, as KNB elaborated. As noted in a 2017 study conducted by Breidahl herself, the importance of work is a widely shared value in a Danish context, where

the vast majority of both native Danes as well as first - and second generation immigrants agree, that it is a societal obligation to work as long as one is able to. Meanwhile, she added, a larger share of first and second generation immigrants than native Danes, agree that work is a main priority, even if it means less free time. KNB then moved on to discuss how contemporary integration policies are aimed at civic integration and active citizenship from the offset. In fact, specific requirements are now set up as preconditions for entry into Denmark, permanent residency or naturalisation (obtaining citizenship). Current policies, she emphasized, are aimed at ‘civilizing’ or ‘disciplining’ newcomers by promoting a functional, individual autonomy. As such, obtaining citizenship as well as permanent residency permits require economic self-sufficiency within a defined time period. As KNB emphasized, contemporary immigration policies mark a paradigmatic shift towards practices of temporary protection (providing temporary residence permits) with the ultimate aim of repatriation. Here, she referred to the established debate of whether labour market attachment fosters national identification among immigrants. This debate explores the interrelation between socio-economic and socio-cultural patterns of integration. Referring to the work of sociologist Milton Gordon (1964), KNB explained how economic integration is crucial in stimulating other aspects of migrant integration – including identification with the host country. Put differently, she posed the question: Do migrants in gainful employment have a stronger identification with the host country – compared to migrants outside the labour market? These and related questions have been widely debated within academia, where most studies suggest that labour market attachment does hold an influence on national identification among immigrants, she noted. In the Danish context specifically, there is a lengthy tradition for disciplining citizens to behave in a certain way through paternalism and strong state involvement. These political practices, she emphasized, rely on the public perception about welfare state institutions as legitimate in intervening in these ways: Here, social cohesion and a strong sense of national identity is key to the survival of the Danish welfare state. As such, the “employment first” strategy, where immigrants are expected to swiftly integrate into the Danish labour market, appears as an attempt to maintain or strengthen the perception of welfare state institutions as legitimate in the eyes of the wider Danish public, while aiming to enhance civic integration and active citizenship among the immigrant population from the offset. Lastly, she added, the Danish welfare state holds a strong tradition for ‘ranking’ social problems according to their perceived urgency and severity at a given point in time, which also appears as an aspect of the implementation of the “employment first” strategy.

Throughout the day participants in the audience as well as online participants were actively involved in the question and answer session that followed after each speaker's intervention.

The first day of the SIRIUS Denmark dissemination event concluded with a screening of the documentary film "Human Flow" by director Ai Weiwei. MP briefly introduced the thinking behind the making of this documentary and explained how it gives a visual presentation of human migration at a time when more than 65 million people around the globe have been forcibly displaced from their homes in order to escape climate change, famine and war. The documentary thus portrays a very vivid picture of the scale of the greatest human displacement since the second World War. She explained how Weiwei does this through a focus on the personal narratives of refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Palestine, Mexico and Kenya - seeking a new home in Turkey, France, Greece, Germany or Italy, and allows their voices to reveal the true impact of their journeys on their everyday lives away from their original homes. Their voices represent a striking representation of what it means to seek safety and shelter. After the screening of the documentary MP thanked everyone for the day's discussion and concluded by saying that she very much looked forward to continuing the conversation during Day Two of this event.

On the second day of the SIRIUS Danish team final dissemination event, MP started by thanking participants, stakeholders and colleagues for their active participation during the previous day before presenting the program for the second day.

First guest speaker was the founder and director of [Refugees Welcome](#), as well as the Danish Country Coordinator of the [European Website on integration](#), Michala Clante Bendixen (MCB). Her presentation revolved around the meaning and importance of labour market integration for refugees in receiving countries and was entitled: "No Integration Without a Secure Future. The Danish Labor Market from a Refugee Perspective". The second guest speaker of the day was Martin Jensen (MJ) from Career Services at Roskilde University discussing how to plan a career after graduation, specifically for foreigners and newcomers to Denmark. The following guest speaker was journalist Lilas Hatahet (LH) discussing the role of unions in integrating migrants and refugees into the Danish labor market. Next item on the agenda was municipality service provision in relation to labour market integration, which was presented by integration consultant at Roskilde Municipality, Khalil Ahmad (KA). Following a discussion of the role of municipalities in relation to labour market integration, Bjarke Friborg (BF), organiser and analyst at PROSA - Danish Association of IT Professionals, discussed how

PROSA has been able to contribute towards labour market integration through a focus on labour rights and unionization.

After a lunch break, a panel debate chaired by MP addressed the topic of: “Making it in the Danish Labour Market: Do’s and Don'ts!”. Panel members included Partner President Saumya Priya (SP), from the Copenhagen branch of the International Dual Career Network, Wesal Zaman (WZ), PhD researcher at the Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University and Subhiksha Kalaiarasan (SK), Senior Data Engineer at MobilePay A/S and Board Member at Spouse Community Aarhus. The panel members triggered a vivacious discussion by sharing their personal experiences and perspectives of how to make it in the Danish labor market, in the face of a number of challenges. Panel members discussed the importance of networks and workplace norms that are specific to the Danish context and useful for MRAs to know about in order to successfully navigate the Danish labor market.

MCB kicked off the debate with a focus on the manner in which the Danish parliament misunderstands the concept of refugees when the focus is on temporary stay. She argued that a majority of members of the Danish parliament have adopted the notion that there is a limited amount of space for refugees in Denmark – and that we need to send some home to make room for new ones. She pointed out that even during the two periods when Denmark received the largest number of refugees - Bosnians in the 1990's and Syrians in 2016 - they were relatively easily distributed across municipalities and do not present a problem today. This "paradigm shift" stipulates that refugees are only supposed to stay for a few years, and that Denmark’s focus must be on return rather than integration. This, MCB emphasized, will create serious problems in the future; for refugees as well as the Danish society.

She then proceeded to present some facts about refugees in Denmark. All types of residencies in Denmark are temporary at first and can only be extended by 2 years at a time. She expressed how this often impacts young refugees and their educational plans particularly, as such policies stand in the way of securing them a future in Denmark. The present rules, she continued to explain, were introduced in May 2017, and before that they were altered in 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2015. This constitutes a problem in itself due to the form of unpredictability that it poses for refugees.

She continued by adding that most ethnic Danes do not realize how extensive the negative discrimination of foreigners in Denmark has become. In fact an increasing number of

complaints against Denmark have been taken to the UN Human Rights Committees, and many end up voting against the Danish state. Also, the European Court on Human Rights in Strasbourg has several times found Danish laws to be in breach of the articles - recently it was the special 26-year rule in family reunification cases. MCB concluded her presentation by referring to the research of Hans Lassen which shows that refugees and their children are in fact doing well in Denmark. Although it is well-documented that refugees have a lower employment rate than both Danes and other non-Western immigrants, (due to refugee groups being significantly more burdened by trauma that constitutes a barrier to the labour market), in recent years there has been a marked increase in the employment rate and family reunification of refugees. In fact, during the period from 2015 to 2018, the employment rate of refugees with more than three years of residence more than doubled, from 20 to 43%. This is a significant growth of 23 percentage points in just three years. Michala concluded that as a general recommendation it is important to highlight the great progress that Danish society has made in the area of integration, with the aim of investing much more in refugee integration in the future.

Second guest speaker for the day, MJ, discussed strategies for finding a job in Denmark as an international student after graduation, (so not specifically as an MRA). He referred to how his work centers around competency assessment and the importance of bridging the gap between academia and the employment market. He mentioned specific challenges that newcomers face when attempting to enter the Danish labour market. Strategies for entering the Danish employment market are based on survey data, information provided by employers as well as recommendations made by partners of Roskilde University such as Danish Industry, Danish Chamber of Commerce, The Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (Akademikerne) and the National Union of Students (Danske Studerendes Fællesråd). He referred to how surveys suggest that student jobs are key to finding employment after graduation, while internships and collaborations of various kinds may also prove advantageous. Secondly, he emphasized how building a network is key - both while being a student as well as after graduation. In this regard, he added, participating in events, seminars and public lectures can be a useful approach. Thirdly, he highlighted the importance of building a solid CV. He further elaborated on how learning the Danish language will make graduates more attractive candidates for any job. He concluded by arguing that surveys suggest that the ability to explain how your academic opportunities can contribute to a specific position is of crucial importance for anyone looking to obtain employment after graduation. According to a recruitment analysis conducted by Ballisager, 80% of employers start by reading through the

CV of potential employees, while 49% of employers do not read through the application if the CV is not considered relevant, he noted. In addition, he underlined how the survey suggests that approximately 58% of employers recruit by utilising their professional network. Based on these findings, Martin underlined the importance of graduates' being able to explain how their academic competencies can be utilised, communicating in less academic terms when writing resumes and applications and lastly, to make broad job searches - also outside of academia - when wishing to obtain a job after graduation. Based on the Partnership Alliance, MJ presented seven recommendations for stakeholders; to ensure that Denmark is an attractive career destination for foreigners, provide easy access to Danish language classes for internationals, to include internationals in academic and social communities; to ensure that international students have knowledge of - and affiliation to the Danish labor market; to convince companies to carry out a determined effort to recruit internationals; that the potential of entrepreneurship must be unfolded among international students and that the legislative barriers for foreigners should be eliminated. Martin added seven supplementary recommendations from a career guidance perspective; namely, to encourage and support all kinds of different network activities; to prioritise Danish language courses; to raise awareness among students regarding the Danish Labor Market from the very beginning of an educational programme; to engage with the Danish labor market as much as possible during studies (internships, project collaboration, course activities e.g.); to prioritize competency exercises and career learning activities and finally to teach students how to utilise academic competencies within the employment market.

Following MJ's presentation, journalist Lilas Hatahet took the floor. She is currently employed at the media organisation International Media Support. She started by thanking the organizers for inviting her to share her experience of entering the Danish labour market and to discuss the role of the Union of Journalists in helping her to find a job within the Danish media industry. She explained how the Union of Journalists played an important role in her career trajectory in Denmark, as the union established a network of refugee journalists and directly connected them to Danish media establishments. She added that it was important to share her previous experiences with labor unions in her country of origin (Syria). She originally came from a country where unions are considered ineffective, useless and as serving the interests of the dictatorial regime, she explained. Therefore, she had no faith in the role of unions when she first arrived in Denmark. In Syria, it can even be considered shameful to be a member of a union, Lilas emphasized. She was therefore under the impression that she would not benefit from becoming a union member – except that such a membership would allow her free

admission into Danish museums. She then explained the transformative process she had gone through to adapt to these new understandings about union membership in Denmark which required hard mental processing work for her. She expressed how having to accept that adapting to a work life in a new context is full of dilemmas and struggles, and how she had to figure out how to make the process and transition less of a struggle. She then elucidated how she had to reflect on her potential career opportunities in Denmark – as a journalist, a presenter, a writer... what was she able to do without a workable knowledge of the Danish language? She described how she decided to learn English in the first instance, as it was easier within the time frame she had at her disposal and cognizant of the fact that this would provide her with more options to work internationally, especially at a time when much work takes place online. She elaborated on a common rule she learned about finding a job in a host country; figuring out how one's skills and knowledge can best be put to use within a specific context. In her case, Lilas knew she could be a resource for European media organisations, specifically those focused on the Middle East and North African region, where she has an advantage and a thorough knowledge base, including her media skills and language competencies (Arabic, English and now including, Danish). She expressed how when she started looking for a job, the Danish Union of Journalists (DJ) helped her in three important ways: They provided workshops regarding employment rights of journalists in Denmark, union advisors explained how the Danish employment system functions and what possibilities were available for refugee journalists like Lilas to land a job. In addition, she noted, they provided her with mentors and referred her to specific work projects. She expressed her gratefulness in particular to Mogens Blicher from DJ and Michael Wagtmann, Senior Consultant at International Media Support (IMS, where Lilas is currently employed), who believed in her competences and acknowledged the importance and potential benefits of providing labour market integration for newcomers to Denmark. She explained how Mogens and Michael gathered all refugee journalists, created a network and established a platform entitled 'Immigrant Voices'. In sum, when trying to find a job as a newcomer to Denmark, Lilas concluded it is important to know your rights, to know the employment market as well as one's possibilities, build a network and to write down one or more short-term strategies which can enable a newcomer to reach a longer-term goal based on overall challenges as well as individual strengths and weaknesses. There were of course challenges, especially Denmark's laws, which refugees have to navigate through and which often lead to insecurity and instability. She also hoped that the general perception of refugees in Denmark - as somewhat inferior and as not having skills - can be worked out through an educational campaign. Integration into the Danish labor market, Lilas concluded, is a

collaborative responsibility that must be shared between the individual, labor unions and the government's integration policies and initiatives.

Next on the agenda was a presentation made by Khalil Ahmad who talked about challenges and opportunities for labour market integration of migrants and refugees in a Danish context, specifically drawing on his experiences from working at Roskilde Municipality. First, Khalil drew attention to the fact that 250 refugees and family reunified persons were attending the municipality's integration program in Roskilde as of October 2020, while there were 190 registered labor migrants. Here, he added that the first item on the agenda when dealing with newly arrived migrants, as a public case worker, is to provide newcomers with accommodation and knowledge regarding laws, rules, rights and duties. There is an established aim of ensuring 'a swift integration process' at a municipal level, where labour market integration and learning the Danish language are first on the public agenda, while at the same time, introducing newly arrived refugees to the Danish educational system and making sure that they have a fundamental understanding of the norms and values of the Danish society, he explained. Activities for newly arrived refugees at the municipal level include job training (CV and job applications, analyzing job posts, visiting workplaces, role play – preparing for job interviews), short courses, jobs with subsidies for employers, mentoring programs and job placements, language training courses and networking programs, which entails matching new-comers with volunteers, Khalil elaborated.

After participants gained a nuanced insight into the municipal approach to receiving newly arrived refugees in Denmark, Bjarke Friberg from Prosa (Danish Association of IT Professionals) provided a perspective of how labour market integration can be achieved through labour rights and unionization - utilising the case of PROSA. BF elaborated on how labour unions and unionization can be considered as a way of limiting the exploitation of migrants within the Danish labour market context. As further explained by Bjarke, PROSA works to achieve these objectives through creating a networking platform for IT professionals in Denmark as well as access to potential employees and communities within the IT industry on an international scale. Furthermore, the organisation provides IT events as well as legal counselling in English, and cooperates with external stakeholders to improve the options for international IT-professionals in Denmark (Hack Your Future, DGCA, ISWP, UNI Global Union, Game Workers Unite, International House Copenhagen and Copenhagen City Council). Finally, Bjarke explained how PROSA functions as an inclusive democratic organisation for

its members as well as its employees. He then moved on to discuss the challenges to labor market integration that Prosa has been established to address. First, there are some challenges to labour market integration that he defined as ‘shared’ problems among the refugee and migrant population: Namely, legal issues, language barriers and the effect of xenophobic narratives in public debates. Secondly, some issues are related to an information deficit regarding Danish salaries, the number of working hours and other general regulations within the employment market. Thirdly, a number of issues that are commonly encountered at PROSA are specifically related to the Danish IT industry, where there are few collective, sectoral agreements. Here, divisive factors can be offshore outsourcing of tasks and the common practice of training one’s own replacement. A general tendency, he added, is that an increasing number of internationals join unions and unemployment funds. Meanwhile, Bjarke elaborated, migrants tend to have a broader range of concerns than trade unions are traditionally equipped to handle. There is, however, an urgent need to find an efficient manner of dealing with the particular challenges that migrants face within the Danish labour market, since it tends to be more difficult for migrants than for native Danes to quit their jobs if the conditions are not in line with official regulations. Here, a central question remains whether unions are, not only equipped, but also reliable advocates for the rights of migrants within the Danish employment market, Bjarke concluded. He suggested that this matter must be one that should continuously be tackled by professionals working in the field of labor market integration of foreigners in Denmark.

Following a lunch break, MP chaired a panel on the Do’s and Don’ts for MRAs in the Danish Labour Market. Panel members included Saumya Priya, Wesal Zaman and Subhiksha Kalaiarasan.

First off was Saumya Priya from the Copenhagen branch of the International Dual Career Network (IDCN-CPH). She started off by explaining how she initially migrated from India to France in 2016 and then from France to Denmark in 2018. She detailed her experience of entering the Danish labour market starting with her background in research and teaching and how she ended up working at the IDCN-CPH. She joined the organisation in 2018, volunteering as part of their management team. In 2020, she became the Vice President at IDCN-CPH, and as of September 2020, she became Partner President. IDCN-CPH is a non-profit association of companies, NGOs and academic institutions that is run and organised by partner members on a voluntary basis, she explained. IDCN holds over a 100 corporate partners across 14 locations.

The organisation was launched in Copenhagen in 2016 and its corporate members include four Danish universities (CBS, KU, DTU and RU) as well as large corporations with vast resources (such as Carlsberg, Maersk, Ørsted, Nestlé, Unicef, L'Oréal e.g.). Only 19 out of 270 active and employment-seeking members of the IDCN-CPH have been recruited through the network, even though all members are highly educated. This sheds light on the challenges associated with entering the Danish labour market as a foreigner, Saumya pointed out. Nonetheless, the role of the IDCN-CPH is to increase awareness regarding the Danish employment market, aid professional development through workshops and presentations, help build a professional network and facilitate labour market integration, she added. She emphasized that there are particular social norms associated with professional networking, being in a workplace and engaging with colleagues that are entirely different in Denmark than elsewhere. Therefore, she had personally learned that it is useful for internationals to learn certain ground rules when aiming to enter the Danish employment market. Understanding both the written and unwritten rules is of fundamental importance, she emphasized. For example, CVs are commonly structured in a 'Nordic style' that is different from the preferred style in other areas of the world. Furthermore, in Denmark it is common to call recruiters in order to show that you are genuinely interested in a position, she explained. Networking both online and offline is similarly crucial in a Danish context, where in other locations it might be enough to do online-based networking. Here, building and maintaining relations with potential employers in order to build a trusting relation is vital. Finally, Saumya elucidated, it is important to identify one's transferable skills, acquire new skills that could be useful within one's field and to explore alternative options such as internships and salary subsidies. On another note, she added, it is equally important to know what not to do in the Danish employment context: Here, one should not be selective in building a network, as any connection can prove useful. Notably, in a Danish context it is not polite to simply ask for a job. Rather, (potential) work relations usually take time to build, as they are first and foremost network-based. It can also be useful to showcase one's skills rather than simply listing these. Lastly, one needs to have the courage to not just settle for any job, as it can lead to a situation where one will never be granted opportunities within one's own field.

Next up was panel member, Wesal Zaman. Wesal discussed his personal experience of arriving in Denmark as a refugee from Afghanistan.

Wesal explained how it was initially difficult to choose a host country based on the knowledge he had prior to arrival. Meanwhile, he added, opportunities revealed themselves upon arrival. First, however, there was the difficult transition from being placed in an asylum center, to having to adjust to an everyday life in a Danish context, which implies starting from scratch with nothing other than determination, goals and ambitions. He elaborated on how there are practical challenges to consider as well as cognitive challenges of having to deal with a past as a person seeking asylum, which took its toll. He described how it was a conscious decision to connect early on to the Afghan diaspora community in Denmark, but to not become fully entrenched within the community: Wesal explained how he had found it important to build a strong network, reaching beyond the Afghan community in Denmark. He further noted that he had to work twice, or even three times, as hard as native Danes to reach the same level of accomplishment, particularly in regard to his professional life. He then moved on to discuss what he labelled as “the integration trap”, based on his encounters with the municipal system. Specifically, his initial discouraging experience through an encounter with a social worker at a Danish municipality. Here, he provided an example of the potential implications of the “work first” strategy. At his first meeting with a municipality case worker, he explained that his dream was to continue his studies. To this, the case worker informed Wesal, that: “your education means nothing here” and “studying in English is a waste of your time and our resources”, Wesal expounded. Instead, the case worker encouraged Wesal to obtain employment as quickly as possible - perhaps as a bus driver or a cleaner. This example, Wesal emphasized, raises wider concerns regarding the authority of social workers versus the susceptibility of newly-arrived refugees who, in most cases, know little of their new-found setting. In this context, integration is perceived as a “one size fits all” scheme that generally disregards the skills, capabilities and background of individual refugees, he explained. At this point, Wesal encouraged migrants and refugees to follow their dreams, and to remain determined, regardless of their initial encounters with authoritative figures. With patience and determination there are ways to get there, he added. He concluded that, as in his personal case, the path to becoming a PhD candidate (at Roskilde University) required hard work, dedication and reaching out to people who had not initially formed part of his immediate network.

The final member of the panel, Subhiksha Kalaiarasan, elaborated on Wesal’s contribution by highlighting that patience is indeed a virtue when it comes to foreigners seeking a job in the Danish labour market. She underscored how important it is not to take rejections on job applications as personal. Agreeing with Lilas Hatahet, she emphasized how important it is for

foreigners to make and find the right time to seek a job in Denmark. In this regard, she drew attention to the importance of up-skilling oneself on a regular basis. Foreigners especially need to stay up to date with their industry and to create their network with a clear strategy in mind. She concluded by highlighting two key recommendations; one for MRAs as they seek a job in Denmark. Her advice was for foreigners to accept a job interview when offered, to “exploit” networks and to start working when an opportunity arises (even if not directly in one’s precise field of expertise). Her second concluding point addressed concerns that native Danes may have about immigrants taking their jobs, people speaking foreign languages, other stereotypes. It is important that as a human community we all learn to live together. Employers have an important role to play in forging such perspectives, Subhiksha concluded.

Following this panel debate, the SIRIUS documentary “Workers: 11 Stories From the European Job Market”, was screened. Danish SIRIUS lead partner, Professor Michelle Pace, introduced this interactive documentary briefly. She explained how the main focus was on integration of refugees and migrant workers within the case countries across Europe covered by this project. The documentary consists of two series of short stories in ‘virtual dialogue’ with one another: The first series sheds light on the challenges faced by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees throughout the process of looking for a job, attending job interviews and utilizing networks. The second series examines the concerns of host country natives; the discourse of migrants taking their jobs, people speaking a foreign language, their unusual requests about diverse food or different ways of dressing. It also addresses the meaning and impact of such stereotypes and how diverse communities can flourish. Among the key points raised by the documentary, the concerns of employers regarding the reliability of migrant workers was a recurring feature. The aim of these interactive short films, Michelle explained, is to utilize audio-visual forms of representation as supplementary tools to the academic/research on labour market integration and to help the SIRIUS project team reach out to a wider (public) audience.

Following the documentary screening, there was a final round up discussion between the facilitators, stakeholders and participants (physically present at the event as well as those online). The dialogue centered on the importance of focusing on a more individualised approach to refugees and migrants among public case workers and generally, in public policy. It can oftentimes seem as if stereotyping and xenophobia precludes migrants and refugees from being acknowledged and treated as individuals with specific competencies, personal characteristics and backgrounds. The question of how to promote diversity within host

communities, as well as on how to increase cross-cultural dialogue, were simultaneously discussed. Furthermore, the importance of utilizing previously obtained skills and competencies of third-country nationals was pointed out - not merely for the sake of the individual, but also for the best utilization of the available pool of resources within the Danish labour market. The facilitator of the two-day event and SIRIUS Danish lead partner, Professor Michelle Pace, emphasized how discouraging it had been that this research project had received very limited media coverage in Denmark, and that while Danish policymakers had been invited to participate, they had not shown interest in the project results. This led to a discussion of the significant gap between academia and contemporary politics, where the established approach to migration and matters of integration are not knowledge-based, and wherein non-Western migrants and refugees are constructed as a threat or a burden to Danish society. Concerns were also raised regarding the close link between policy makers and established media organisations, where constructive, critical and investigative journalism does not seem to be the prominent form of reporting in current times.

In concluding the two day event, Professor Michelle Pace thanked all participants, stakeholders and colleagues, especially the SIRIUS Danish team members - the event's support staff - for their time and engagement in the SIRIUS project and final dissemination event as well as for their dedicated interest in the challenges and opportunities related to labour market integration of migrants and refugees in a Danish context. She ended with a note of encouragement for a continuation of the discussion that had been kicked off over the course of these two days and expressed hope that the reflections from this event reach beyond the SIRIUS final dissemination event and in particular in the wider public space.